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ABSTRACT

Members of the Polish faculty at the English Institute (Poland) primarily use English as a second language (ESL) techniques to teach writing, with grammar and idiom drills, and little writing beyond the sentence level. An American professor, on the other hand, used a process approach to teach writing by providing specific instructions about locating a suitable topic, generating or inventing information, analyzing the audience's and the writer's roles, organizing the material by mode and aim, writing the text, and carefully revising it. The students in the American professor's class performed better than those taught by the Polish faculty. Despite the process approach, the Polish students' writing was distinctively Slavic in style. Rather than favor the linear discourse that American schools promote, Slavic discourse favors a circumvoluted organization and style, which entails turning, coiling, and folding about a central concept. The types of proofs that Polish students used in persuasive prose relied heavily on definition, comparison and contrast, circumstance, relationship, and historical testimony. Polish students also rejected the scientific method and the entire "thesis" orientation to essay composition. The results of the American professor's class indicate that the process approach to writing instruction can be used successfully with ESL students when they have achieved moderate fluency in the foreign language, and that teachers need not wait until students have achieved near perfect fluency and correctness before requiring greater quantities of second language writing. (HOD)

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Teaching the Process Approach in Poland

Ronnie D. Carter

As an exchange professor at Warsaw University, Poland, during the spring term of 1984, I taught one literature and two writing courses at the English Institute. Indiana University maintains an exchange program with Warsaw University, providing interested American faculty with the opportunity to teach their areas of expertise. Thus I was able to give a course in Western American Literature ("Cowboys and Indians") to fourth-year Polish students. Since I had taught composition since 1964 at the college level, I received a third-year Reading and Writing section. Quite a few of the Polish students majoring in English want to acquire an American "broadcast standard" accent rather than British Received Pronunciation; to help out, I volunteered to lead a section of fourth-year Conversation; instead, I got a first-year Writing group. We can see from this interesting change of assignments that Chairmen and Deans are the same the world over and that the American varieties are no better at scheduling than their Polish counterparts.

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Because the English Institute prepares Polish students to teach English to other Poles, to translate English texts into Polish and vice versa, to work in business and government offices where English is essential, the Institute has almost 400 majors. The sections are routinely quite small by our standards: about twelve students per class. There is plenty of opportunity for personal contact and individualized work. All

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lectures and in-class discussions are given in English, so the students are exposed to approximately twenty-five hours of spoken English each week. Since the students are selected for the program by competitive examination and because they already have six or seven years of training in English, they are well prepared and highly motivated to do well. In fact, some of their first-year students (freshmen) speak more fluent and correct English than most of the native speakers on our campus. At the end of each academic year, each student takes a required departmental examination in English language ability (in reading, writing, and conversational skills). The teachers at the Institute administer both the written and oral parts of the required test. My first-year section had the highest pass rate of the seven sections (91 % versus 80 % average for the other six sections). The third-year class also had the highest pass rate of six sections on the required exam on reading and writing skills (84 % versus 70 % average for the other sections). That **both** my sections performed better than those taught by Polish faculty at the Institute could be no accident. One major difference in methodological approach, I believe, was the reason for such a noticeable gap in student performance.

The Polish faculty at the English Institute primarily employ "English as a Second Language" techniques, with loads of grammar and idiom drills and precious little writing beyond the sentence level (a paragraph per week at most for first-year students). The third-year students write paragraphs and a couple of short essays, but with plenty of grammar and

idiom drills thrown in. Their approach to writing is essentially "product" oriented: that is, close textual examination of existing English texts, analysis of certain features of said text, then an assignment to write a paragraph or short essay that attempts to imitate the published text. Moreover, the Polish faculty often have excellent literary training in British and American literature; therefore, they often employ literary criticism as a major element in teaching the writing of a foreign language---in this case, English.

On the other hand, I utilized a rather rigorous "process approach" to the teaching of writing by (1) providing specific instructions about locating a suitable topic, (2) generating or "inventing" information, (3) analyzing the audience's and the writer's roles, (4) organizing the material by mode and aim, (5) writing the text, and (6) carefully revising it. None of these crucial stages in discourse development is covered by the Polish faculty because their linguistics training encourages the ESL slant to writing courses, because they have seldom been exposed to current American research on rhetorical theory, and because they enjoyed the literary analysis. As a firm believer in the process, I attempted to present the major stages mentioned above and then asked the Polish students to write four major essays and an essay exam. The essays were revised twice, once after in-class peer "editing" and once more after I had critiqued them. My students stated (often groaned) that they were doing three to four times as much writing for me as their peers did for the

Polish faculty.

It would seem that there are two possible reasons why my sections did significantly better than my Polish colleagues'. Was the "process approach" the cause, or did the extra writing turn the trick? I cannot answer that question myself until I teach writing again to foreign students, but next time under more controlled conditions and for a longer time. To be more specific, I would need to teach at least two different sections of the same course with different techniques, one which stressed the process approach and the other which focused on extra writing. Even then, the results may not prove conclusively which factor brought about the better scores. Perhaps both contributed. Nonetheless, it seems fairly clear to me that the process approach can be used successfully with ESL students when they have achieved moderate fluency in the foreign language; moreover, it equally becomes apparent that one need not wait until students have achieved near perfect fluency and correctness before requiring massive doses of writing in the second language. Finally, careful revision after outside critiquing can speed up the achievement of fluency in the second language. The value of peer revision has already been demonstrated by researchers on native language writing; that it works equally well with second language students is at least probable although not certain. More research obviously needs to be done in this area.

Teaching bright and eager students brought up in a different culture and trained by a different educational system developed new insights in

my teaching. Because of the "humanities " orientation the English Institute students had received in secondary school, they wrote more in the "classical essay" style: first, ask an important question in the introduction; next, investigate it from a variety of perspectives in the body; and finally, announce the thesis in the conclusion. Since they had not been exposed to "thesis paper" style and organization, their essays seemed to roam about the topic like a Russian novel, analyzing every nuance in possible meaning, circling the same idea from a series of angles: its definition, its circumstance, its causes and effects if known, its uses and abuses, etc. Scholars who have studied ***contrastic rhetoric*** tell us that 20th-century American and British educational systems, especially at the university level, try to promote **linear discourse** whereas Slavic systems favor **circumvoluted discourse** organization and style: namely, turning, coiling, and folding about a central concept.

The students have learned their lessons well from their professors. During my stay in Warsaw, I was retained as the "final native editor" for the philosophic journal Dialectics and Humanism and for the literary journal Neopholological Quarterly. Never have I read such academic prose that circled about a subtle definitional point for twenty pages without coming to a clear and concrete conclusion. No journal in the universities of our western democracies would ever consider accepting such involuted work that quite lacks in a linear, systematic method and concrete proofs. This is not the case in the social and applied sciences, where the

British/American empirical/experimental methodology is well known, carefully studied, and systematically imitated. I helped edit six or seven MSS for a Polish botanist, all of which were subsequently accepted by western journals. The prose style and methodology closely follow our scientific procedures. But the humanities student in Poland is trained by an entirely different method. Let us briefly examine the sources of this difference.

According to Tim Wiles, Director of the Polish Studies Center at Indiana University-Bloomington, "Nobody likes a good joke better than a Pole. Joke-telling is a very common part of society in Poland." Jokes are told in Poland purely for humor, just as they are all over the world, but it's the Polish political joke that is the most revealing: a grassroots reaction to the economic hard times and the Soviet domination of Poland since World War Two. For example, Polish Prime Minister and Communist Party Chief Jaruzelski meets Adolph Hitler in Hell:

Jaruzelski: "If only I had an army like yours, I could conquer all of Europe."

Hitler: "If I had only had a propaganda organization like yours! No one in Germany would yet know that we lost the war."

The types of proofs that Polish students found convincing in persuasive prose were markedly different from those we like to see in American academic prose. Their proofs went heavy on definition,

comparison and contrast, circumstance, relationship (especially contraries and contradictions), and **historical** testimony. Most of these proofs are familiar to us as the "artistic" or internal proofs of classical rhetoric. The students seldom use **recent** history or **recent** historical figures to assert or testify to anything. Why? Their reluctance to accept TRUTH from external sources, especially political sources, results in part from the Polish government's use of propaganda methods. Because their government misused statistics to distort the economic picture during the 1950s, the students almost never quote a statistic in their essay. In fact, to quote a percentage or ratio to a Polish ***humanist*** is to court instant skepticism; however, students in the social and hard sciences, medicine and engineering more closely adhere to the British/American regard for number crunching in empirical/experimental studies. That the Polish government has rewritten the history books used in elementary, secondary and university classrooms three times since World War Two causes most students to shy away from citation of ***recent history*** as a source of evidence. Yesterday's hero may become tomorrow's ***persona non grata***, and who wants to become attached to a liability, especially when most of the choice jobs come directly from the government.

The second notable difference is the structure of the essays, a strange, fascinating mix of circumvoluted twisting and turning, almost spiraling down on the topic, combined with what looks like on the surface as a deductive structure. The most common organization of student essays

opens with a problem to be analyzed or a question to be answered. The body of the work examines several alternative answers from a variety of angles; in the conclusion the best answer ('conclusion') is offered, a sort of thesis if you will. From my conversations with Polish colleagues I learned that some of the weaker students, even at the third-year level, write their essays in Polish first and then translate them into English; the stronger students compose even their rough drafts in English. However, there appear to be no differences in organization or types of evidence between the two. Those schooled on American "thesis-background information-evidence-conclusion" type of linear discourse may see the deductive strains of Polish humanistic prose as an earlier, more basic style of thinking and writing, with the inductive organization of our linear prose as a modern, more sophisticated form of discourse production. Without getting into the question of which style is better or more sophisticated, I have found that the solid background in deductive, circumvoluted discourse was not the slightest handicap when the Polish students learned linear discourse style. Quite the contrary. They were able to assimilate and master with amazing rapidity the principles of the scientific model, so rapidly in fact that I am now convinced that more research needs to be done on the correct sequencing of organizational formats and discourse styles. How, I asked myself, can Polish students grasp these principles better after four months than most American students after four years instruction in linear discourse construction?

True, the Polish students were above average in verbal abilities in comparison to my American charges, but not that much advantage accrued to the Poles; after all, English was a second language to them. Could it be that permitting, perhaps encouraging, the student to "wander" about the "topic landscape" will later foster better, more competent command of linear discourse than the present American system of teaching the famous triad of unity-coherence-clarity from junior high school on? Is it possible that we are skipping a step on the climb to discourse maturity? My experience would indicate that there may be a better way to achieving mastery of linear prose organiztion and style.

There is a certain "playfulness" in Polish student essays because they are not really trying to **persuade** the reader; rather, these bright minds want "an exchange of views" on serious topics, to accept or reject as they choose. For them, the only truths are those personally generated and personally tested. If we ***exchange*** two views, then each of us is one view richer than before: if, in five years, your view proves out ***for me,*** then I will be that much better off. If, however, your view proves untenable for me, then nothing much has been lost.

In short, Polish humanities students present interesting challenges to the ESL instructor because they reject (or haven't been exposed to) the scientific method and the entire "thesis" orientation to essay composition. The causes of that rejection or nonexposure are based in historical circumstances and pedagogical theory to which the Polish students have

been subjected; however, that they could acquire so rapidly the scientific methodology and linear discourse style suggests to me that there may just be a missing link in our present way of sequencing instruction in discourse construction.

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